

Mexico

Country Facts

Population: 111,211,789

Languages: Spanish.

Predominant Religions: Christian (Roman Catholic)

Time Zone: Five to eight hours behind Greenwich Mean Time

Voltage Requirements: 110 volts. Many hotels, schools and businesses also have 220 volts.

Telephone Codes: 52, country code

Introduction:

Travelers visit Mexico for its sunshine, seas teeming with fish and coral, crystal-white beaches, lofty mountains and volcanoes, exotic wildlife, collectible folk art, and the breathtaking remains of ancient cultures. And some go for a less lofty reason: Mexico can be cheap.

The megalopolis of Mexico City is Mexico's capital and lies roughly in the middle of the country. Approximately 8 million to 9 million people live in the city limits, but roughly 19 million call metropolitan Mexico City home. The country remains a land of baffling contradictions. Just down the street from a five-star resort, families camp in ramshackle buildings without plumbing. Burros, with rough-hewn carts in tow, amble alongside express highways. Serious pollution problems confront some cities, and a huge population strains its resources. There is widespread poverty. But through it all, Mexico endures.

Compassion in Mexico:

Compassion International's work in Mexico began in 1976. As of 2010 more than 19,700 children participate in more than 135 child development centers. Compassion partners with churches to help them provide Mexican children with the opportunity to rise above their circumstances and become all God has created them to be.

Cultural Information:

- A handshake or nod is the standard greeting among male colleagues in Mexico, although friends commonly embrace.
- Women will often exchange a light embrace and a kiss on the cheek. Men will greet women in this fashion, but not at an initial meeting.
- It is common to greet and ask about the other person's family as a courtesy and as a light conversation starter.
- Mexicans commonly have more than one given name and two surnames (e.g. Jose Luis Martinez Salinas). The first surname often comes from the father and the second can either be from the mother or a given name. Respected elders often are addressed as "Don" or "Doña," followed by a given name.
- Mexicans value friendship, humor, honesty, hard work and personal honor. They also respect individuals who, regardless of level or education, use their ingenuity to solve daily problems.

- Mexicans are friendly and very good hosts. They easily and naturally try to make you feel comfortable and to serve you. They are generous and often share all they have, even if it is not much.
- When entering a room for a social gathering it is customary to greet everyone in attendance.
- Mexican firms observe tight hierarchies and many companies are family owned. At formal business meetings, the top people will be introduced to each other but not to those of lower ranks.
- Mexicans typically stand close to each other while talking, sometimes touching their friend's clothing or just sharing what Americans often consider "personal space."
- The "thumbs up" gesture expresses approval. Tossing or throwing items is considered rude and may be offensive; items should be handed directly to another person.
- Mexicans love to entertain and they are accomplished socializers. The restaurant, bar and nightclub scenes are lively, large and thriving in Mexican cities. The Viernes Social or Friday night social is an institution and it is when business colleagues relax after a tough workweek. Since there is no work the next day, these "socials" can go on into the wee hours.
- Another Mexican event is the Sunday barbecue held at a private home. Visitors that get invited to such an affair are advised to accept, as to do otherwise can insult the host.
- Men and women in certain communities tend to separate into different areas during these get-togethers, even when all of the invitees are business associates. It is traditional, so don't buck the trend!
- Meals are usually served at a different schedule from the one you may be used to. They serve breakfast at around 7:00 a.m., and a big and complete lunch (which is the main meal for Mexicans) that may include a soup, salad, a stew, and often beans—all accompanied with corn tortillas. Dinner is generally served at around 8:00 p.m.
- Mexico is the heartland of machismo and in some rural areas, women have a very subordinate role in public and business life. These women are often condemned to serve and work for their families and some have even been given into marriage due to a parental deal that will benefit the family. This usually only occurs in minor and midsized communities with strong ethnic influence.
- Mexicans are patriotic and generally proud of their country, despite its challenges. They may call citizens of the United States "americanos" or "norteamericanos," but like to remind U.S. citizens that Mexico is also part of North America.
- Dress codes are important in Mexico. Females do not regularly wear skirts above the knee or shorts. Males also avoid shorts, even in large, popular cities. If inappropriately dressed, women may become recipients of unwelcome and inappropriate compliments from males on the streets. Modest clothing may avoid these embarrassing moments.
- Mexicans treasure their language. Teaching you to speak Spanish is a way of spending a valuable social moment with you. Learn a few words that will make them feel important and be ready to learn some more on the road.
- Mexico hosts a variety of cultures and all kinds of people. There is a small wealthy class, a larger middle class and a majority of low class, poor and extremely poor communities. All classes are found in every place, even within the mayor cities.

- Mexicans are unique in regards to their glorious history of conquerors and fights for freedom. Most people are mestizo, which is a mixture from the ancient indigenous groups and the conquerors from Europe.
- The majority of the people in México are Catholic or come from a Catholic background. The Catholic Church in Mexico emphasizes mysticism and miracles from the saints.
- Mexicans are known by their social skills and by the groups they interact with. They normally hold on to their traditions and have tight family relationships.
- About half of the Mexican population is 20 years old and younger. Children, teenagers and young adults are a challenging fertile soil for the Christian church.

Dos and Don'ts:

- Do allow for cultural differences. Women may still encounter machismo, but can minimize it by ignoring the perpetrator.
- Don't wear T-shirts and shorts in the big cities unless you are a student or want to advertise that you are a foreigner.
- Do remember that if you are invited to lunch, expect the appointment to be between 2 and 3 p.m., since Mexicans dine later than people in the United States and other countries. The lunch is the most substantial meal of the day and lasts about two hours.
- Don't ask questions about money unless you are negotiating a business deal. Mexicans consider it rude to talk or brag about personal finances.
- Do ask about the health of children and relatives.
- Don't get arrested in Mexico. Contrary to the law in the United States, in Mexico you are presumed guilty until proven innocent, and the process of justice is lengthy and antiquated.

Travel Tips

Personal Safety:

In the cities along the Pacific Coast and especially the border towns, crime has increased. Robberies of taxi passengers have become prevalent in some areas. Although Mexican roadways are safer than they were years ago, robberies can occur along some highways. Beware, too, of police officers looking for bribes. Bus travel is generally safe as long as you do not leave belongings unattended.

The southern state of Chiapas continues to be a volatile region. Check the latest conditions before a visit. Always carry your tourist visa. Wherever you travel in Mexico, it's best to dress plainly, skip the flashy jewelry, and avoid carrying such conspicuous big-ticket items as expensive cameras. When you go out for the day, bring only as much cash as you'll need for that outing. Only use an ATM that's inside a bank or other business and only make withdrawals during daylight hours.

Health:

It's common knowledge that travelers to Mexico from developed countries may get an upset stomach or diarrhea, known as *turista*. To help prevent such problems, wash your hands

frequently, and in the smaller towns, avoid food from street stands, don't drink tap water or anything with ice, and be careful with dairy products. [The larger cities are no less sanitary in terms of food or drink than those in developed countries.] Most hot, freshly cooked food should be safe [especially in restaurants in major tourist resorts], but peel fresh fruit and avoid raw vegetables. In smaller towns avoid foods that are difficult to clean, such as lettuce. Make sure meat is cooked thoroughly and stick with prepackaged or boiled drinks if in doubt.

Malaria and dengue fever are still occasionally found. Protect yourself with insect repellent [preferably one containing Deet]. In some areas, stray dogs could carry rabies, so avoid them. If you're even nipped, get treatment immediately. The sun can be strong, so use sunscreen liberally and wear a hat. Air pollution is extreme in Mexico City and may cause problems for people with respiratory ailments.

Medical facilities are good in the larger cities. Most doctors have trained in the United States, Canada or Europe. Medical fees are far less than what you would pay in the United States [especially for dental work].

We strongly advise you to contact the CDC (www.cdc.gov) or check with your personal physician for more information about your specific health needs while traveling, including any recommendations for immunizations.

Money:

Traveler's checks and credit cards are accepted at most tourist-oriented businesses. Exchange houses called *casas de cambio* are found along all major tourist routes in cities and offer better exchange rates than banks do. U.S. dollars are widely accepted, although less so in the interior. U.S. coins, however, are only accepted at a few border towns.

Weather:

It's pleasant to visit Mexico mid-September through mid-May, though some parts still have a fair amount of rain in October and November. [It rains most during the summer.] Mexico City is chilly in the early morning and at night during the winter. The coldest cities are those in the mountains.

Be prepared for higher humidity in coastal areas and at the inland archaeological sites in the Yucatan Peninsula. Summer temperatures there can hover around 100 F / 38 C with near-100 percent humidity. The average coastal day temperatures year-round are in the 70s-80s F/23-32 C, with nights in the 60s-70s F / 15-27 C. Bring a jacket or sweater and an umbrella any time of year.

Dress:

Long sleeves and pants, plus plenty of insect repellent, are recommended for the rainy mosquito season. Always wear a hat and plenty of sunscreen [SPF 30 or higher] when visiting the tropics and coastal resorts to avoid painful sunburns. Pack an umbrella and light jacket or sweater year-round.

All information taken from Weissmann Reports, the World Factbook and Compassion International.